

## **Senate Republican Caucus Agriculture Agenda Fall 2005**

Washington farmers are losing the battle against increasing fuel, fertilizer and tax expenses; increasing minimum wage rates and global competition; and burdensome land, water and labor regulations. Senate Republicans propose the following solutions to promote family farm viability and help Washington agriculture survive.

### ***Tax relief. Ease tax burdens on agricultural operations.***

- Provide immediate tax relief to help farmers stay in business.
  - Eliminate sales tax on dyed (off-road) diesel used for agricultural purposes. This tax is applied as a percentage – as opposed to a flat per-gallon tax – aggravating the cost when fuel prices rise.
  - Reduce or eliminate sales tax on farm equipment purchases. Washington is one of the few states in the nation to tax farm equipment.

### ***Renewable fuels. Reward farmers who produce them and citizens who use them.***

- Support an incentive-based plan to expand consumer markets and encourage producers to grow biodiesel and ethanol crops.
  - Provide exemptions or credits against state property tax for cropland used to produce renewable fuel crops.
  - Exempt farm equipment producing renewable fuel crops from sales tax.

### ***Land use. Protect property rights and promote options to sustain farm viability.***

- Strengthen deference to locally controlled land use planning in order to preserve and promote the economic viability of productive farm operations.
  - Expand the types of supplemental income activities allowed on agricultural lands to help support farm operations while maintaining rural character.
  - Make GMA land designation, best available science, and critical area requirements more sensible for local governments and producers.
  - Oppose arbitrary buffer mandates that disqualify farmers from federal incentive payments under voluntary federal conservation programs.

### ***Labor. Help our producers survive national and international competition.***

- Rein in wage and labor requirements that create a competitive disadvantage for Washington farmers and processors and put Washington workers out of work.
  - Freeze escalation of Washington's minimum wage if Washington's unemployment rate exceeds the national unemployment rate.
  - Seek timely notice to farm employers when a workers comp claim is filed.
  - Remove disparities related to seasonal worker hours from industrial insurance wage calculation provisions.

***Water for farms. Support voluntary regional solutions that don't set precedents.***

- Develop multipurpose water storage projects and regional water supply solutions using existing statutory authority to address water needs as quickly as possible.
  - Facilitate movement of water to the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the Columbia Basin Project to address Odessa Aquifer depletion.
  - Support conversion of interruptible water rights to non-interruptible status for Columbia and Snake River mainstem diverters.
  - "No net loss" is not acceptable state water policy.

***Water code. Promote conservation and keep agricultural water in agriculture.***

- Remove regulatory barriers to the efficient use and transfer of agricultural water.
  - Increase flexibility between agricultural water uses.
  - Ease "use it or lose it" relinquishment provisions to encourage conservation.
  - Eliminate the annual consumptive quantity transfer test.
  - Defend the Attorney General's exempt well stock watering opinion.

***Water quality. Demand credible data and legal authority in water quality regulation.***

- To preserve agricultural lands and protect farm viability, state agencies should first exhaust voluntary opportunities and incentives under federal conservation programs before resorting to command and control regulatory mandates.
  - Protect viability of family livestock operations by keeping Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) regulations close to federal regulations.
  - Integrate federal CWA provisions for non-point agricultural storm water.

***Funding. Support funding to sustain Washington agriculture.***

- Agricultural research, technical assistance and infrastructure improvements help Washington agriculture provide the world's safest food supply while complying with the world's most daunting regulatory requirements.
  - Support research on agricultural production and acceptable controls for disease, noxious weeds and insects.
  - Support Conservation District Technical and Cost Share Assistance.
  - Support WSU's Life Sciences Building.
  - Support water storage and reservoir projects.
  - Support Columbia & Snake River dredging to improve commodity transport.

***Regulatory responsibility. Bring accountability and legitimacy to agency rules.***

- Significant agency rules should not become effective until they are signed by the Governor and ratified by the Legislature.